**The Motivation  
to Move**

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While most people acknowledge how important exercise and physical activity are to the human body, few are regularly active enough to receive significant health benefits. Estimates suggest that 40% of the American population is considered completely sedentary, while less than 20% are active at an intensity and frequency recommended for cardiovascular benefit. Worse yet, the dropout rates for those who do begin an exercise program reach 50% or more by the end of the first six months.

There are three types of factors that affect our motivation to stay with an exercise program. ***Personal factors*** have to do with you and your perceptions toward exercise. ***Program factors*** focus on the exercise program, it's convenience and the enjoyment you derive from it. ***Environmental factors*** deal with your external world that you can, and at times, can not control. The questions below may shed some light on how these factors affect your exercise program.

***Personal Factors:***

 How do you feel about the value of exercise?

 What is your past experience with exercise?

 What is your skill level in performing your chosen activities?

 What is your own personal motivation level?

 How do you perceive the exercise program's convenience and enjoyability?

 Do you feel that the activity is overly uncomfortable or difficult?

 Do you have the ability to resolve typical barriers to exercise? (i.e., travel, illness, time)

***Program Factors:***

 Is your program convenient? (Time of day, number of weekly sessions, schedule flexibility, accessibility to facilities)

 Does your chosen activity require special, costly or time-consuming preparation?

 Is the program of reasonable enough intensity so that you find it challenging but not punishing or aversive?

 Is the program varied enough to maintain interest and diminish boredom?

***Environmental Factors:***

 Are you comfortable with the location at which the activity takes place?

 Have you set up some regular cues to remind yourself to exercise? (Pack your gym bag and put it by the door, have equipment at home visible and easily accessible, schedule exercise on your calendar)

 Are you able to accommodate weather conditions? (Exercise indoors instead of outdoors, exercise at home instead of driving to the gym on icy roads)

 Do you have an ongoing support system? (Include your family in activities, get a "fitness partner" to workout with, meet other members in exercise classes)

It's helpful to think of this motivational process as dynamic and ongoing; different strategies are needed for different stages of your exercise program. Here are some practical tips to keep you moving forward:

**Build on success...** start with small goals that lead to larger goals.

**Find a role model...** find someone who started where you were. Feel inspired by their success.

**Be realistic...** set attainable goals. Being realistic will prevent you from becoming frustrated later.

**Set well defined goals and reward yourself for reaching them...** this will encourage you to set new goals.

**Keep a journal...** you'll be able to see how far you've progressed and evaluate what works and what doesn't.

**Take bimonthly photos...** these pictures let you see changes over time. Often change is gradual and we don't see the difference from day to day.

**Create variety...** as you learn the basics add new exercises and activities into your program. This will help keep you from becoming bored with your routine.

**Try not to focus on what you are giving up...** focus on new options that you'll have after you become more fit.

**Don't make exercise just another item on your to-do list...** connect to it on a deeper level.

**Educate yourself...** the more you know the less likely you are to be injured or to get stuck in a rut.

**Use your time wisely...** it doesn't have to take hours to achieve your fitness goals. Greater intensity can improve results and shorten total workout time.

**Know your limits and stay within your means...** fatigue, insomnia, irritability, and elevated resting heart rate are all signs of overdoing it.